TELEGRAM
Rocky Mount, North Carolina
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MAYBE STATISTICS DO LIE

It appears that the old saying "statistics don't lie," does not apply to the argument as to whether the smoking of tobacco products does or does not produce lung cancer. No business subject has ever been run through the statistical mill with such thoroughness as the argued relationship between smoking and lung cancer. Yet, despite all the statistical tables that have been presented, neither side of the issue has been able to come up with definite proof to back their contentions.

If it is true that statistics cannot lie, then something is wrong somewhere. Somebody's statistics are lying, because, while one set of statistical tables appear to make an air-tight case that smoking does produce lung cancer, another list of statistical information just as assuredly "proves" that no such relationship exists.

It would seem that despite the old saying, statistics can sometimes be misleading and can also be easily misinterpreted.

The many statistics produced in an effort to link lung cancer and smoking have been well publicized, and there have been times in recent years when it appared that smoking must be the chief cause of cancer in the lungs.

But take a look at these statistical items from the other side of the argument:

Item — When mathematical adjustments are made for both growth in population and aging of the population, total cancer deaths between 1930 and 1953 showed a definite decrease. Yet, during this period, medical ability to detect cancer and medical tendency to think in terms of cancer increased enormously.

Item—The difference in the lung cancer rate between men and women has widened over the last 30 years. It was about 2½ times greater for men in 1930 and is now about 4½ times greater. Yet it was during those very years that women took up smoking by the millions.

Item—Lung cancer rates are about the same in the U. S., Denmark and Switzerland. Yet, the per capita consumption of cigarettes in Denmark and Switzerland is about half the rate in the U. S. The English and Welsh smoke only 70 per cent of the U. S. per capita cigarette rate, but their lung cancer mortality is more than twice as great. Per capita consumption of cigarettes in New York state and Idaho is about the same, yet the lung cancer rate in New York is four times greater than in Idaho. Smoking habits in Charlotte are little different from those of other comparable communities, but Charlotte has a lung cancer mortality that is only one-third of the national average.

Item—Statistics prove that only a tiny percentage of heavy cigarette smokers develop lung cancer.

Item — As for mouse-painting experiments, a man would have to smoke at least 100,000 cigarettes a day to get an equivalent exposure to his lungs. When these mice were painted with half a dose, they did not get skin cancer. This suggests, theoretically, that man could smoke 50,000 cigarettes daily without danger of lung cancer from smoking.

Item—Tobacco was once considered (on the basis of statistical research) to be the principal cause of cancer in the mouth. Today, it is known that cancer of the mouth is caused by a severe nutritional deficiency and the tobacco theory has been totally discarded.

Item—Dr. Joseph Berkson, head of the section of biometry and medical statistics of the Mayo Clinic, says "It is my personal opinion, and I know as much about it as anyone else, that smoking does not cause cancer of the lung." And Dr. Harry S. N. Greene, chairman of the department of pathology, Yale University School of Medicine, says, "The case against tobacco is derived mostly from statistical associations and experimental work with animals. The mere fact of a coincident increase or decrease in the frequency of given happenings does not mean that one is related to the other."

To sum up the questionable use of statistics, it has been found that cigarette smokers have more ulcers, divorce more often, change jobs more frequently. Amazing what the weed will do, isn't it?

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